



# Washington Will Miss Henry Waxman

Rep. Waxman hails from a time when demonization didn't sell.



Rep. Henry A. Waxman, D-Calif., will retire following the 2014 midterm elections after serving 20 terms in Congress.

By Susan Milligan

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Rep. Henry Waxman, D-Calif., a tireless advocate for the environment and devoted public servant, announced recently that he will retire after 20 terms in the House. The announcement brought the following statements:

*He is one of the House's most talented and committed legislators. Henry has made an extraordinary difference in creating a healthier environment and more accessible health care. I will sorely miss him ... For nearly four decades, Henry has been a tireless fighter in Congress for Californians and for all Americans. Throughout his tenure, Henry has made it a priority to protect our nation's air and water, combat the dangers of tobacco, fund AIDS research, and work for greater access to affordable health care.*

And this one:

*It is hard to imagine a Washington environmental community without the wisdom and perspective of Henry Waxman ... There was always a feeling that Mr. Waxman desired to reach agreement that advanced his objectives, even if he had to give on some points. Waxman's desire to negotiate and reach outcomes with some bipartisan input is a lesson almost completely missed by the current environmental leaders. Frankly, I'm going to miss him.*

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One was made by the House Minority Whip Steny Hoyer, a fellow Democrat who has known Waxman for 50 years. And the other was made by Scott Segal, an energy expert at Bracewell & Giuliani. Segal argues on behalf of the energy industry, a business often at odds with the unabashedly environmentalist Waxman. So why are the statements so hard to tell apart?

One reason has to do with the men themselves. Waxman is highly respected on both sides of the aisle; Hoyer is loyal to his colleagues (including Republicans he's worked with) and Segal is a pro who does not demonize lawmakers simply because they sometimes disagree with him or his clients. These three all understand the way Washington once worked, a time when people understood they were all there for something bigger than themselves – for America and for democracy. They understand that you're supposed to discuss issues honestly and compromise.

Unfortunately, demonization sells in modern Washington. That is how we ended up with a tweet from MSNBC lauding a biracial TV ad for cereal (fine, so far), but adding the unnecessary and just offensive comment that the ad might upset "rightwingers." MSNBC apologized, appropriately, but what was the point of dividing the issue along us-vs-them lines? If one really believes in racial interaction and unity, what is the purpose of saying only one side of the political spectrum can practice or celebrate it?

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And it doesn't stop at the doors of the Capitol, either. Rep. Randy Weber, a freshman Texas Republican, tweeted about President Obama's State of the Union, calling the democratically-elected president "Kommandant-in-Chef" (we presume he meant "in chief"), and a "Socialistic Dictator." Wow. Not just a Democrat Weber wouldn't vote for, but an actual Nazi, socialist and a dictator. Aside from the over-the-top and contradictory insult in that tweet, it doesn't make sense. If Obama indeed was a dictator, wouldn't we have immigration reform, higher taxes on the rich and sweeping regulations aimed at controlling climate change?

But it's not about logic or honest debate. It's about demonization. The trend has been worsening in recent years. And it will be worse still with the loss of a dedicated legislator like Waxman.

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